

Then Proteus whipped the horse up. His brain seemed on fire, his nerves taut. They talked with avidity on indifferent subjects, relapsing into spaces of silence that seemed interminable to either. When they reached Bella's hotel, Harry sent the horse to the stable, lit a cigar, and walked briskly towards his house. He felt the need of stretching his limbs.

When he reached his gate, he found a boy in a faded blue uniform sitting on the verandah steps, fast asleep.

He woke the lad up. He was from the telegraph office, the boy said, and he had been waiting a long time for Mr. Proteus.

"Why didn't you stick the message in the door?" said Proteus, as he unfastened the latter, and lit the gas in the hall.

The message was paid for, the boy said, but he wanted Mr. Proteus to sign for it. "They was very particular at the office," he said, confidentially, "about signing." Proteus signed, and the boy still lingered. So Proteus, being in a high good humor, gave the boy a coin, and the coin and the boy quickly disappeared.

Proteus opened the yellow paper, mildly wondering what it could be about. It was from his wife, and ran: "*Expect us to-night. You might have come. Ethel not well.*"

Proteus crumpled the paper slowly in his hand, and stared at the pattern of the wall-paper, with his lids half-closed. Then he turned into the silent drawing-room, drew the curtains apart, and stared out into the street through the half-open slats of the blinds.

Confusion! His plans spoiled, and by that little minx! But soft! not spoiled. The east-bound train would leave an hour before his wife's train came in, and he and Bella would be fifty miles away by that time.

He smoothed out the message with a half-triumphant, half-pitying expression, and read it again, very slowly, dwelling on each word. He found himself suddenly trying to picture

Carrie arriving at the depot, and her surprise at not finding him there; and her still further bewilderment at reaching the house and discovering it in darkness, and no Harry. For the servants were taking their much-needed vacation also. And then later —

It was not a pleasant thing to picture. Proteus started, and confronted a rather pale face in the hall mirror, the reflection of his own, distorted by a very ghastly smile. He grew fascinated with this not flattering likeness, and fell into a sort of reverie.

He returned to consciousness by hearing some one at the door. It was the telegraph boy.

"Another message?" demanded Harry.

"No, sir, but I thought you might have an answer," said the boy, yawning.

"Have you been waiting outside all this time?" said Proteus, aghast.

The boy nodded. "It ain't very long," he said, with a comforting smile. "Only three minutes."

Proteus shook himself together. He felt confused, and not altogether master of his brain.

"No, there is no answer," he said, slowly. "Stay," he added. "Would you take a letter for me to the Allan House, at once, if I gave you a quarter? Well, sit down there and wait."

"What shall I say to her?" he said to himself, as he paused before his secretary, biting a pen-handle.

"Ah, I will send her the telegram, with a line, and she will understand. It is for the best."

"Take this to the Allan House," he said, handing the envelope to the boy. "It is for Mrs. Macintyre. See that she gets it *yourself*, at once. Oh, here's your quarter. And look here! Send a cab to me here right away, and tell the driver to hurry!"

The boy disappeared, and Proteus hurriedly gathered his top coat and umbrella together. A flourish of wheels on the pavement up to his gate told him his cab had arrived.